

THE
WILSON BULLETIN

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF
ORNITHOLOGY

VOL. IX.

DECEMBER, 1902.

No. 4.

THE CUBAN TODY (*Todus multicolor*).

JOHN W. DANIEL, JR.

ONE of the most interesting birds to be met with in Cuba is the Cuban Tody (*Todus multicolor*). A flycatching, kingfisher-like species, it leads the life of a Passerine bird, yet its relationships are not in keeping with its perching habits. It is an unusual bird in coloration, form, and habit. Flat mandibles and flycatching habits at one time caused the family to which it belongs to be classed with the Flycatchers, but its affinities are now recognized as with the Motmots and Kingfishers. Strange, quaint little birds that they are, the Todies in more than one sense are peculiar, in view of the fact that of all the birds of the West Indies, the family Todidae is the only one not occurring elsewhere, its six species being confined to the Greater Antilles, a separate species upon each island. While there are now no species upon the mainland which closely approach them in form, it is safe to surmise that there was, in earlier times, a mainland branch of the family which has long since perished in the rigor of the continental struggle for existence while the insular species have survived under more favorable conditions of habitat.

Throughout Cuba the Tody is an abundant species.

Its favorite haunts are the low bushes covering the hillsides and the tropical growth fringing the small streams of the ravines and valleys. Its characteristic note, a lively little whistle, readily betrays its presence; but its small size, listless habits, and protective colors, make it inconspicuous amongst the luxuriant plant life of its home.

During the course of a several month's stay in Matanzas province, in the winter and spring of 1889, I had the good fortune to frequently observe this curious little bird.

To the west of Matanzas bay, beyond the rough limestone hills which rise from its western shore, there stretches the broad and verdant valley of the Yumuri. Dotted with palms and clothed in rich vegetation, it is a vale of tropic beauty perhaps unsurpassed in all Cuba. Low hills rise gently around it and, in the ravines between them in some places, small streams, their margins a profusion of plant life, trickle over rocks, fall in miniature cascades, and course down to the plain below. One day in February, as I followed one of these little streams in search of birds, working my way through the rank vegetation bordering it, I ran across the Tody for the first time. A sudden little whistle, rapidly repeated, came from the thick foliage of a bush close at hand. There was no accompanying movement amongst the leaves, and for some time I stood watching closely in hope of making out the author of the note, supposing that it was a bird of some size, proportionate to its voice. Close scrutiny did not reveal it, however, and I struck the bush with my gun barrel, when there was a quick whirring noise, and out darted a tiny, brilliantly colored bird about the size of a Winter Wren, and dropped to a twig a few feet away, where it sat bobbing its head up and down. With its queer, stocky little body raised to an upright attitude, its bill pointing vertically, it soon became rigidly motionless, and thus remained for some time as if asleep. It was surprisingly tame, not taking flight until I came so close that I could almost touch it, and then flying a few feet to another bush from which it

made no effort to move until I again closely approached it. Sitting listlessly on a twig, while I stood a few feet away, it now and then suddenly darted out after insects, catching them with a quick snapping of its bill and returning to its perch to swallow them, each such effort being accompanied by a peculiar whirring sound made by its wings and a hummingbird-like twitter. In swallowing the insects it seemed to have a good deal of difficulty, working its head up and down in the effort. The agility with which it pursued an insect, the suddenness and quickness of the sally, was very much in contrast with the air of stupidity it assumed while at rest, showing that in spite of its apparent laziness it was nevertheless on the alert for its prey.

The tameness shown by this first Tody met with was not exceptional, the various individuals met later showing the same indifference. It is characteristic of the species and a feature of disposition evidently not inherited from its relatives, those wary birds, the kingfishers. In form, the Tody strongly suggests a small kingfisher. It is a little under four inches long, its body short and stocky, its head large in proportion to its body, mandibles long and flattened, and its feet small and delicate. An unusual bird in form, especially in view of its size, its plumage is even more striking. Its throat is bright crimson, the feathers tipped faintly with white; breast and abdomen dull white or ashy; flanks pale pink; crissum yellowish green; lores yellow; auriculars blue; under surface of wings and tail light brown; and the crown, back, and upper surface of the wings and tail bright grass green.

While in the majority of cases, I found the birds in pairs, it was apparently too early for them to be breeding, and I did not find the nest. It is in regard to its nesting habits that shows conclusively its relationship to the kingfishers, excavating holes in banks as it does, and laying white eggs.

The lack of fear displayed by the Tody may be somewhat due to the bird's reliance upon its protective colors to

escape notice. Its usual upright attitude as it sits motionless midst the green leaves of a tropical bush put to the best protective advantage the uniform green of its upper parts while the pointing of the bill vertically may be the result of protective impulse, as shown in the case of the Least Bittern (*Ardetta exilis*).

The Tody is an example of the many curious forms of bird life which, combining bright plumage with strange form and habits, make the tropics such an ornithological wonderland.

AMONG THE VULTURES IN ASIA MINOR.

BY H. C. TRACY.

THE same varieties of the vultures occurring in Southern Europe, from Spain to Greece, and on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean, are met with in Asia Minor, where they are common enough to attract the attention of the travelers, although not so numerous as the hosts of them seen in some parts of Egypt.

The little Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), corresponding to the American Turkey Vulture, is common in the vicinity of Turkish towns, but seldom so domestic a street scavenger as to deserve the name of "Pharaoh's Chicken," as the species is familiarly called.

The bird from whom our ideas of the vulture tribe are usually taken is the Tawny Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), otherwise Gryphon, or Griffin Vulture, equally well named the Goose Vulture, from the general proportions of the long neck, evenly merging head and small eyes. The Tawny Vulture is by far the commonest, and composes the greater part of the flock gathered about any large carrion on the plain.

A far less common species is the Black Vulture, for which scientific terminology has found the fitting name of *Vultur monachus*; the distinctly marked patch of down on the